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A Japanese-American Basketball League and the Assimilation of its Members into the Mainstream of United States Society

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of participation in a Japanese-American youth basketball league on the assimilation of its members into the dominant American culture. Two groups of Japanese-Americans were compared: participants (players) and non-participants (non-members). The data were collected by a written questionnaire, formal and informal interviews, and direct observation. Significant differences at the .05 level were found between the groups in the dimensions of structural, marital and identificational assimilation. Participation in the ethnic basketball league did not appear to promote overall assimilation into the mainstream of American life. Instead, it seemed to reflect an index of ethnic solidarity for Japanese-Americans.

Introduction

A number of studies have been conducted on the acculturation and assimilation of immigrants and ethnic group members in the United States, since upward mobility of immigrants and ethnic group members comes from the absorption or adoption of societal values of the core culture. In the past two decades, most of the research studies have focused on the significance of religion, intermarriage, and occupation as vehicles of assimilation. Allison (1979: 53) suggested sport as "a vehicle through which minority members can learn the value orientations of the dominant culture (achievement, competition etc.)." Overall, though, very few studies have been conducted on the usage of sport or games as an agent of the assimilation process into the core society. To these writers' knowledge, no empirical research study has been undertaken to study the significance of sport as a vehicle of assimilation of Japanese-Americans into United States society.

Japanese-Americans have been seen as being the most mobile and adaptive of all the non-European immigrant groups in the United States (Feagin, 1978; Kitano, 1976; Petersen, 1970). Feagin and Fujitaki (1972) reported that Japanese-Americans' economic upward mobility and acculturation have been remarkable. However, it is probable that a significant amount of time will be needed for Japanese-Americans to be fully accepted into North American society (Feagin, 1978: 361).

The questions of whether sport is a means of upward mobility for Japanese-Americans and whether Japanese-Americans are now using sport as a vehicle for upward mobility into the host society continue. In the 1930's (prior to World War II), Japanese-Americans apparently employed sports, especially basketball, as an agent for upward mobility. The purpose of this study was to determine whether participation in an ethnic basketball league in Japanese-American communities affected the rate of the assimilation process of its members into the dominant culture of American life.

Assimilation

In majority-minority relations, assimilation has been defined as a process whereby a minority group was gradually integrated into the culture and social system of the dominant group (Farley, 1982: 85). Gordon (1964) expanded the assimilation analysis begun by Park and Burgess (1921) and distinguished seven different assimilation variables (sub-processes) which would occur during the general adaptation of an immigrant group to core society. These were:

1. Cultural assimilation: change of cultural pattern to those of the core society (acculturation)
2. Structural assimilation: large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of the core society on the primary group level
3. Marital assimilation: large-scale (significant) intermarriage
4. Identificational assimilation: development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on the core society
5. Attitude-receptional assimilation: absence of prejudice
6. Behavior-receptional assimilation: absence of discrimination
7. Civic assimilation: absence of value and power conflict.

Gordon's model of assimilation was selected for this study because it was designed to explain the actual adaptation process and it placed an emphasis on generational changes, an important indicator to analyze Japanese-Americans. The measurement of the civic assimilation variable was not clear in previous research studies, and the subjects in this study were too young for an analysis of value and power conflicts; therefore, this variable was eliminated from the present study. In addition, because of the age of the subjects, dating rather than marriage was the criterion selected to assess marital assimilation.

Japanese-Americans have a special terminology for each generation. This terminology is used as a convenience for classification and reference to character types and behaviors (Kitano, 1976: 4-5). The first four generations are identified as follows:

1. Issei: the first generation immigrant born in Japan
2. Nisei: the second generation born in the United States to Issei parents
3. Sansei: the third generation born in the United States to Nisei parents
4. Yonsei: the fourth generation born in the United States to Sansei parents.

In this study, Issei and Nisei after the 1965 Immigrant Act were termed the new Issei and the new Nisei.

Previous research findings appeared to contradict how participation in ethnic sport clubs affected the rate of assimilation of immigrants and ethnic group members. In this study of Japanese-Americans, the following hypothesis was tested: participation in an ethnic basketball league in Japanese-American communities retards the rate of assimilation of its members into the core society.

Methods

Two groups of subjects were tested on six dimensions of assimilation to measure the rate of assimilation. Results were also analyzed to determine differences between the groups.

Although no random sampling techniques were used to select subjects for the two groups, attempts were made to enlist the total eligible population of players in the nine teams of a division of a Japanese-American basketball league as volunteer subjects. Similar attempts were made to obtain a complete population for the non-participant group of subjects. All subjects were second, third, or fourth generation Japanese-Americans males who resided in northern California. They were in the tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade of high school and were 15-18 years of age.

The participant group consisted of fifty players who participated in a Japanese-American basketball league (JABL) during the 1982-83 season. The non-participant group consisted of thirty-six non-players who fulfilled three requirements: (1) they had never been participants in the JABL; (2) either they or their families were involved in at least one Japanese-American organization; and (3) they lived in the geographical area comparable to the participant group subjects.

Research Instrument

Four instruments or methods of collecting data were utilized. These were a written questionnaire, formal interviews, informal interviews, and observations. The written questionnaire, informal interview, and direct observation instruments and research design were derived from Tindall's study (1973), which focused on the acculturation process of non-European ethnic groups and their involvement in an indigenous sport. The instruments were significantly modified, however, to meet the needs of this study. The written questionnaire was designed to measure assimilation on six different dimensions, namely, cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude-receptional, and behavior-receptional.

A formal personal interview, based on the research instrument from Pooley's study (1968), was developed to measure assimilation on the six different dimensions of assimilation of the participant group subjects. A form of the standard focused interview developed by Merton and Kendall (1946) was used for both the formal and informal interviews.

The formal personal interviews, informal personal interviews, and observations were all designed to determine the rate of assimilation of the participant group subjects, the ethnographical make-up of the basketball teams,

the behavioral practices and social network of basketball players as related to basketball games and practices, and the ethnography of the Japanese-American communities.

Data Collection

All data were collected during the period from December 1982 to March 1983. The written questionnaire was administered to the players (participant group subjects) during the third week of January 1983, under the supervision of either a team representative, a team coach, or both. The researcher collected all the questionnaires, answered and unanswered. Of the total of 77 players in the JABL league division, 68 (88%) responded to the questionnaire at the time of its administration.

A total of 82 questionnaires were mailed to the potential non-participant group subjects. A serial number on the questionnaire and the self-addressed return envelope enabled follow-up contacts to be made later. Between the mailing of the questionnaire (January-February) and March 20, follow-up efforts involving two sets of telephone calls and re-mailings to replace lost questionnaires were made to increase the return rate. Eighty-five percent of the mail questionnaires were returned.

Formal interviews were conducted between the researcher and 36 Japanese-Americans involved in the JABL. Those interviewed were two league executives, eight team representatives, eight team coaches, and 18 players. The interviews were held between January 28 and March 12, 1983. The direct observations and informal interviews with the members of the participant group, their parents, their peers, league executives, team officers, referees, and church ministers were conducted at athletic, social and religious gatherings from December 28, 1982, to March 20, 1983.

Data Analyses

A total of 138 subjects voluntarily responded to the written questionnaire in some manner. However, some subjects were deleted from the study as they did not meet the criteria: (1) age between 15 and 18, and (2) both natural parents of Japanese ancestry. The final number of subjects was 86: 50 in the JABL participant group, and 36 in the non-participant group. The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire among the 86 subjects was $r_{tt} = .90$, on the basis of the Hoyt-Stunkard ANOVA technique.

Data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using the *t*-test and chi-square test to determine differences between the groups on the degrees of cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude-receptional, and behavior-receptional assimilation.

Differences between the two groups were tested using a one-tailed *t*-test and a one-tailed chi-square test. The level of significance was set at the .05 level of confidence as the criterion level.

Data obtained from formal interviews, informal interviews, and direct observations were used as supplemental information to describe the participants and the Japanese-American Basketball League. No statistical analyses were performed on the data obtained from the formal interviews, informal interviews and direct observations.

Results

The hypothesis relating to assimilation was tested by first analyzing each of the six dimensions of assimilation separately. The results of these separate analyses are as follows:

1. Cultural assimilation. The results of the various items included as measures of cultural assimilation varied. (See Table 1.) Only two of the ten items tested produced a significant difference. Hence, overall, the differences between the participant and non-participant groups did not appear to be significant.

Table 1: Analyses of Cultural Assimilation

| Comparison: Non-Participant Group (N=36) vs. Participant Group (N=50) | | | | |
|---|----------------------|------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Measurement Item | Non-Participant Mean | Participant Mean | σ_D | <i>t</i> Value |
| Speak J at home ^a | 4.29 | 4.44 | .21 | -.72 |
| Eat J foods ^a | 2.43 | 2.40 | .17 | .17 |
| Study J customs/traditions ^a | 3.54 | 3.87 | .21 | -1.55 |
| Maintain J custom/traditions ^a | 3.57 | 3.66 | .23 | -.39 |
| Read sports: Ethnic N ^a | 4.88 | 4.44 | .13 | 3.52 ^c |
| Read other sections: Ethnic N ^a | 4.87 | 4.60 | .13 | 2.11 ^d |
| Read sports: Area English N ^b | 3.97 | 3.63 | .20 | 1.66 |
| Read sports: Local English N ^b | 1.58 | 1.64 | .28 | .23 |
| Read other sections: Area N ^b | 3.88 | 3.68 | .18 | 1.09 |
| Read other sections: Local N ^b | 1.72 | 1.73 | .28 | .03 |

J = Japanese

N = Newspapers

^a1 = Least assimilation, 5 = Greatest assimilation

^b1 = Greatest assimilation, 5 = Least assimilation

^cp < .01

^dp < .05

2. Structural assimilation. The results of the *t* and the chi-square analyses showed that significant differences in structural assimilation existed between the participant and non-participant groups. (See Tables 2 and 3.) Significant differences were found on six of the eight measures of structural assimilation. The overall conclusion was that a significant difference existed between the groups in structural assimilation.

Table 2: Analysis of Structural Assimilation

| Comparison: Non-Participant Group (N=36) vs. Participant Group (N=50) | | | | |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Item: Group | Non-Japanese Yes | Close Friend? No | Chi Square Value | Phi Coefficient |
| Non-Participant | 35 | 1 | 4.41 ^a | .26 |
| Participant | 38 | 10 | | |

df: 1

^ap < .05**Table 3:** Analyses of Structural Assimilation

| Comparison: Non-Participant Group (N=36) vs. Participant Group (N=50) | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Measurement Item | Non-Participant Mean | Participant Mean | σ_D | t Value |
| Pal J-A after school ^a | 3.38 | 2.35 | .30 | 3.50 ^c |
| Pal J-A on weekends ^a | 3.00 | 1.98 | .29 | 3.52 ^c |
| Pal C after school ^b | 1.94 | 2.74 | .29 | 2.78 ^c |
| Pal C on weekends ^b | 2.27 | 3.02 | .31 | 2.42 ^c |
| Go prefectural (family) picnic ^a | 3.85 | 3.83 | .24 | .10 |
| Attend all-Japanese church ^a | 3.51 | 2.20 | .33 | 3.95 ^c |
| Treated by J-A doctor ^a | 4.09 | 3.98 | .30 | .36 |

J-A = Japanese-American

C = Caucasian

^a1 = Least assimilation; 5 = Greatest assimilation^b1 = Greatest assimilation; 5 = Least assimilation^cp < .01

3. Marital assimilation. The tests on the measures of marital assimilation (dating habits) showed significant differences between the two groups. (See Table 4).

Table 4: Analyses of Marital Assimilation

| Comparison: Non-Participant Group (N=36) vs. Participant Group (N=50) | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Measurement Item | Non-Participant Mean | Participant Mean | σ_D | t Value |
| Date J-A women ^a | 3.83 | 2.78 | .31 | 3.35 ^c |
| Date C women ^b | 3.23 | 3.92 | .38 | 1.85 ^d |

J-A = Japanese-American

C = Caucasian

^a1 = Least assimilation; 5 = Greatest assimilation^b1 = Greatest assimilation; 5 = Least assimilation^cp < .01^dp < .05

4. Identificational assimilation. The chi-square analysis indicated that significant differences existed between the two groups. (See Table 5).

Table 5: Analysis of Identificational Assimilation

| Comparison: Non-Participant Group (N=36) vs. Participant Group (N=50) | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Item: Group | Ethnic Identity | | Chi-Square Value | Phi Coefficient |
| | Japanese | Japanese- American | | |
| Non-Participant | 16 | 19 | 5.33 ^a | .25 |
| Participant | 34 | 14 | | |

df: 1. ^ap < .01

5. Attitude-receptional and behavior-receptional assimilation. The measurement items designed to measure the degree of the attitude- and behavior-receptional assimilations were weak and may not have precisely measured these two dimensions for this Japanese-American sample. The questionnaire items had been designed not to offend any respondent so that they would facilitate truthful responses to the rest of the questionnaire. On the basis of the measurement items, however, no significant differences in attitude-receptional or in behavior-receptional assimilation were found between the two groups.

Significant differences were found between the groups on three of the six dimensions of assimilation. The dimensions showing differences were structural, marital, and identificational. The group differences on these dimensions indicated that participation in an ethnic basketball league in Japanese-American communities retarded the rate of the structural, marital, and identificational assimilation of its members into the host society.

For the three dimensions of cultural, attitude-receptional, and behavior-receptional assimilation, no significant differences were found between the groups. Hence, the results indicated that participation in the ethnic basketball league did not retard the assimilation of its members on the cultural, attitude-receptional, and behavior-receptional dimensions.

Table 6: Summary of Assimilation

| Dimension | Difference in Assimilation Between Groups | |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Cultural | No difference | (Non-Participant = Participant) |
| Structural | Difference* | (Non-Participant > Participant) |
| Marital | Difference* | (Non-Participant > Participant) |
| Identificational | Difference* | (Non-Participant > Participant) |
| Attitude-receptional | No difference | (Non-Participant = Participant) |
| Behavior-receptional | No difference | (Non-Participant = Participant) |

* Difference indicated a greater degree of assimilation.

In summary, the results of the *t* comparisons and chi-square analyses failed to either support or reject the main hypothesis that participation in an ethnic basketball league in Japanese-American communities retards the rate of assimilation of its members into the core society.

Discussion

The arguments proposed by Pooley (1968), Tindall (1973) and others that participation in ethnic sport clubs helped inhibit the assimilation process of members seemed to be supported only to a limited degree by the data in this study. The indications of Blanchard (1974), Lam (1933) and Tindall (1973) that participation in ethnic sport clubs tended to promote ethnic solidarity and structural pluralism among non-European ethnic stock appeared to be confirmed by the data from the JABL participant group. Participation in the JABL seemed to demonstrate important differences on three assimilation dimensions between the groups. Moreover, participation in the JABL did not appear to promote the overall assimilation of its members into the host society. However, results of the statistical analyses for the six assimilation dimensions were mixed.

Another way to explain the assimilation process of this Japanese-American sample can be expressed by the formula, $A + B = A + B_1$, where A represents the Anglo group (the dominant group), B represents the Japanese group (the immigrant group), and B_1 represents the Japanese-American group. The Japanese-American group (B_1) is different from the Japanese group (B) but also distinct from the Anglo group (A). The Japanese culture has been retained, to some extent, by Japanese-Americans; but it has also been affected and modified by the Anglo culture. On the other hand, the Anglo culture has not been affected or modified by the presence of the Japanese immigrants.

This alternative explanation is a modified version of Glazer and Moynihan's social pluralism theory (1970) in which $A + B = A_1 + B_1$. However, the data from the present study did not support the social pluralism theory, as the Anglo group was not modified by the immigrant group.

Under these circumstances, the findings of the present study neither confirmed nor denied that participation in an ethnic basketball league retarded the assimilation rate of its members into the core society. There were some findings, especially regarding structural assimilation, that suggested that participants in the JABL were a little less assimilated than non-participants. However, both groups have been heavily influenced by the Anglo culture.

The sequence model of assimilation process proposed by Gordon (1964: 69-71) was a unidirectional progression. It is shown below.

- Cultural assimilation (change of cultural patterns to those of host society)
- Structural assimilation (large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society, on primary group level)
- Marital assimilation (large-scale intermarriage)
- Identificational assimilation (development of sense of peoplehood based exclusively on host society)
- Behavior-receptional assimilation (encounter no discriminatory behavior)
- Attitude-receptional assimilation (encounter no prejudiced attitudes)
- ↓ Civic assimilation (absence of value and power conflict)

Gordon's model of the assimilation sequence was not confirmed by the data from the JABL participant group. (See Table 7.) The findings relative to the assimilation pattern of the JABL participant group instead followed a pattern similar to that suggested by Allison (1979) and others. In that pattern, the

Table 7: Degree of Assimilation Based on Gordon’s Model (Data from the Questionnaire)

| Dimension | Non-Participant Group | Participant Group |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Cultural | High | High |
| Structural | High | Medium |
| Marital (dating habit) | Medium | Low |
| Identificational | Medium | Low |
| Attitude-receptional | Medium | Medium |
| Behavior-receptional | Medium | Medium |

direction and sequence of adaptation were on the track of structural pluralism. Structural pluralism existed when groups retained some social structures and institutions of their own, but shared others, e.g., attitudes, beliefs, and life styles (Farley, 1982: 354).

The adaptation sequence of the JABL participants was complex, leading to two outcome tracts. (See Figure 1.) As a non-European ethnic group, Japanese-Americans apparently started the assimilation process with acculturation. Japanese-Americans must adopt the language, customs, and traditions of the dominant group in order to be accepted by the host society. This behavior modification in the direction of Anglo expectations has not been accompanied by the simultaneous feelings of acceptance by Anglos.

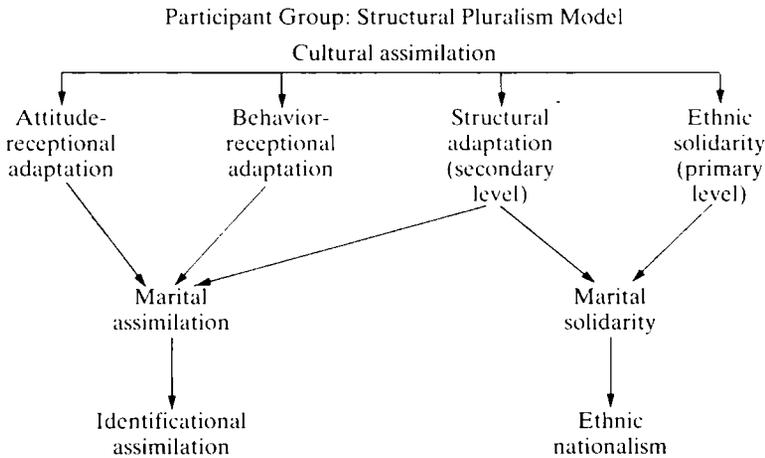


Figure 1. Adaptation Sequence of Participant Group Proposed by Researchers

The structural assimilation of the participant group apparently had been completed to a moderate degree. In their private lives, the JABL participants associated with other Japanese-Americans and participated in predominantly all-Japanese organizations which were structurally parallel to the host society more often than the non-participants did. Structural adaptation at the secondary level and ethnic solidarity at the primary level appeared to proceed simultaneously with behavior-receptional and attitude-receptional adaptation. The participants

seemed to feel that while they were members of the United States society, they were also a group distinct from the mainstream. Consequently, their assimilation on three dimensions (structural, behavior-receptional and attitude-receptional) did not appear to have been completed. Then, either marital assimilation (intermarriage) or marital solidarity (intra-ethnic marriage) seemed to proceed subsequently as next steps in the sequence. Identificational assimilation apparently occurred after marital assimilation, whereas ethnic nationalism proceeded after marital solidarity. Not all JABL participants will take the ethnic nationalism route. Some will take an assimilation route nearly identical to the non-participants. It is not clear what proportion will take which route at this time.

The adaptation sequence of the non-participant group differed from the Structural Pluralism Model of the participant group. This second model, the Anglo Conformity Model, was less complex. (See Figure 2.)

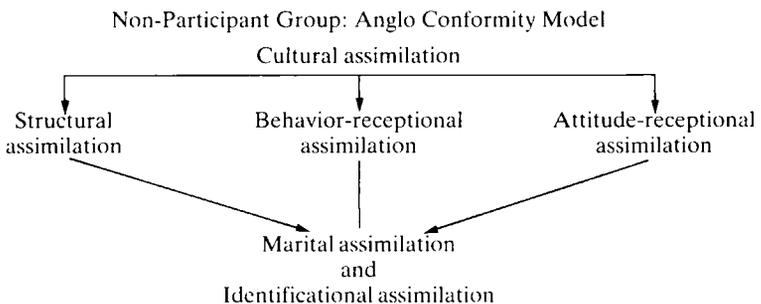


Figure 2. Adaptation Sequence of Non-Participant Group Proposed by Researchers

For the non-participant group, structural, behavior-receptional, and attitude-receptional assimilation appeared to proceed simultaneously. The non-participants appeared to feel accepted by Caucasians. However, due primarily to the visible physical characteristics of Japanese-Americans, assimilation on the marital and identificational dimensions seemed to occur as subsequent steps to the other dimensions.

Conclusions

Within the limitations of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Participation in ethnic sport clubs was apparently not a causal factor favoring the assimilation of Japanese-American high school males. In contrast, participation in ethnic sport clubs appeared to be an index of establishing and maintaining ethnic solidarity.
2. The assimilation sequence of Gordon's model (1964) did not apply to the participant group in this study.
3. Participation in ethnic sport clubs demonstrated some important differences regarding assimilation between the participant group and the non-participant group. The participant group appeared to follow the direction of structural pluralism, whereas the non-participant group appeared to follow the direction of Anglo conformity.

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Une ligue de basket-ball japoano-américaine et l'assimilation de ses membres à la société des Etats-Unis

Résumé

Cette étude examine dans quelle mesure la participation dans une ligue japoano-américaine de basket-ball pour jeunes influence l'assimilation de ses membres à la culture américaine dominante. Deux groupes japoano-américains ont été comparés: Participants (joueurs) et non-participants (non-membres). Les données ont été recueillies par un questionnaire, des interviews officiels et inofficiels ainsi que par l'observation directe. On a constaté des différences significatives au niveau .05 entre les groupes sur les plans de l'assimilation, de la structure (adhésions), des mariages et de l'identification. Le fait de faire partie d'une ligue de basket-ball ethnique ne semblait pas encourager une assimilation générale à la vie culturelle de la société américaine, par contre il semblait signaler une solidarité ethnique pour les Américains japonais.

Eine japanisch-amerikanische Basketball-Liga und die Anpassung ihrer Mitglieder an die US-amerikanische Gesellschaft

Zusammenfassung

Es wurde untersucht, wieweit das Mitspielen in einer japoano-amerikanischen Jugendbasketball-Liga die Teilnehmer beeinflusst, sich der herrschenden amerikanischen Kultur anzupassen. Zwei japoano-amerikanische Gruppen wurden miteinander verglichen: Teilnehmer (Spieler) und Nicht-Teilnehmer (Nicht-Mitglieder). Als Erhebungstechniken dienten eine schriftliche Befragung, förmliche und informelle Interviews sowie direkte Beobachtung. Zwischen den Gruppen wurden auf dem .05 Niveau signifikante Unterschiede in den Anpassungsbereichen Struktur (Mitgliedschaften), Eheschließung und Identifikation festgestellt. Teilnahme in der ethnischen Basketball-Liga schien nicht eine allgemeine Anpassung an das kulturelle Leben der amerikanischen Gesellschaft zu fördern. Stattdessen schien sie einen Hinweis auf ethnische Solidarität für Japoano-Amerikaner zu geben.

Una Liga Japanese-Americana de Baloncesto y la Asimilación de sus Miembros a la Sociedad Norteamericana

Resumen

Este estudio investiga los efectos de la participación en una liga juvenil japonesa-americana de baloncesto para la asimilación de sus miembros a la cultura dominante norteamericana. Se compararon dos grupos de japoneses-americanos: participantes (jugadores) y noparticipantes (no-miembros). Los datos se obtuvieron mediante un cuestionario escrito,

entrevistas formales e informales y por medio de la observación directa. Se pudieron observar diferencias importantes al nivel de .05 entre los grupos en el campo de asimilación estructural, matrimonial y de identificación. La participación en la liga étnica de baloncesto no parecía fomentar una asimilación general a la vida cultural de la sociedad americana. En cambio parecía ser un indicio de solidaridad étnica con japoneses-americanos.

Японско - американская баскетбольная лига и приспособление её членов к обществу Соединённых Штатов Америки.

Резюме:

Велись исследования о вопросе в какой степени влияет на молодых игроков участие в японско - американской баскетбольной лиге, в смысле приспособления к господствующей американской культуре. Две японско - американские группы было сопоставлено: группа участников /игроков/ и группа не принимающих участие /т.е. лиц, которые не являются членами/. С этой целью были употреблены разные приёмы опроса: формальный и неформальный интервью, письменный опрос и прямое наблюдение. Между группами были установлены на .05 уровне характерные различия в областях приспособления, как например в области структуры /членства/, вступления в брак и идентификации. Участие в этнической баскетбольной лиге, казалось, не содействует общему приспособлению к культурной жизни американского общества. Оно наоборот указывало на этническую солидарность японских американцев.

野川 (のがわ), サッティ: 日米バスケットボールリーグとその所属選手のアメリカ社会への適応

<要約>

日米青少年バスケットボールリーグに参加することがその成員にとって現存のアメリカ文化への適応にどの程度影響するかが研究された。リーグ参加者と非参加者の二組の日米グループが比較検討された。調査方法としては、アンケート、公式・非公式のインタビュー、そして直接観察法がとられた。団体帰属性のような構造上の、婚姻上の、そして自己同化の領域での適応性において、両グループには0.05レベルの重要な差異が認められた。民族的バスケットボールリーグに参加することでアメリカ社会の文化生活への適応が促進されることはないようであるが、日米間の民族的連帯感の自覚を与えるように思われる。